A JOURNEY OF COMPASSION:
BECOMING MISSIONARIES TO CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

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“Have you heard of Compassion?”

It was the summer of 1983 and my wife and I had recently transplanted our family from Atlantic Canada to London, Ontario. We were unsure of our plans, but trusting God to fulfill His purposes in us. Then the phone rang with an invitation to join Dave MacLeod, the newly appointed president of Compassion Canada, for lunch. It was a call that would change my life.

I just didn’t know it yet.

At the time, I’d never heard of Compassion Canada. I was familiar with parachurch organizations in the country, including some that worked with children. But one singularly devoted to working with the local church to reach children with the gospel and caring for their material needs? This was new territory.
When Dave called and invited me to lunch, I’ll be honest: I wasn’t interested. I was a pastor; I didn’t want to work for a parachurch organization, something apart from the local church. But a wise man once said, never say no to a free lunch, so I accepted. That lunch lasted about three hours and before we finished I was ready to commit to serving in Compassion’s ministry.

When Dave began to explain what Compassion’s ministry was all about, I could hardly contain my emotions. Could it be true? Could there really be an organization that brings together both missions and children and works with the local church? It seemed too good to be true. Thirty years later, it still seems that way.

Compassion International started back in 1952, when an evangelist from Chicago, Everett Swanson, visited South Korea after the Korean War. He was there to share the gospel with soldiers, but what caught his heart was the plight of the tens of thousands of war orphans. They would sleep huddled together on doorsteps, warming one another with their frail bodies. In the morning, the garbage trucks would come. The drivers would shake the piles of rags, and if any children hadn’t made it through the night, their bodies were thrown into the back of the trucks to be shuttled to their early grave.

As Everett Swanson flew home, the phrase kept repeating in his head, “What are you going to do?” He knew he couldn’t forget or turn his back on the orphans in Korea. So he started raising support from his friends and family to care for these forgotten children.

Right: Everett Swanson was sharing the gospel with soldiers in the Korean War when he witnessed the desperate plight of the war orphans. He knew he had to do something to help these children.
Back then, child sponsorship (which had been around since the mid 1930s) wasn’t nearly as widespread as it is today. Swanson’s passion, however, was contagious. Before too long, Christians across North America began to take up the cause of the poorest of the poor—including Bob and Janet Forsyth, a young couple from the Chatham, Ontario, area.

When the Forsyths, who felt called to missions, saw an advertisement to sponsor a child with Compassion, it was an answer to prayer—a direct link to the mission field. Their relationship with their sponsored child grew through letter writing and prayer. Before too long, they began enlisting their friends and fellow church members to sponsor with Compassion. As their God-given passion continued to grow, they wanted to see more Canadians have the opportunity to sponsor children and spread the gospel. The only question was: how?

In 1962, Bob and Janet drove to Compassion’s offices in Chicago, hoping to convince the leadership to open a branch office in Canada. They arrived full of excitement and anticipation—only to receive an answer they didn’t expect. Instead of beginning plans to open an office, Compassion’s leaders in Chicago challenged the Forsyths to return home and do it themselves. Compassion International would partner with the Forsyths and provide children’s photos and profiles from Compassion’s overseas work so Canadians could sponsor. Best of all, they’d be able to use the Compassion name.

Initially disappointed, Bob and Janet realized that, despite it not looking quite like they’d expected, God had answered their prayers once again and soon a new charity was born, Compassion of Canada. For the next ten years, the Forsyths ran the charity in the basement of their home.
Fifty years later, Compassion Canada looks very different (and not just because we’ve dropped the “of”).

Since 1972, we’ve been based in London, Ontario, where we moved under the leadership of the ministry’s first president, Rev. Jim Somerville. We’ve grown from about 5,000 sponsored children and a handful of staff and volunteers in 1983 to 100,000 sponsored children in 2013 and staff and volunteers located throughout the nation. Christians from twelve countries—from Canada to Australia to Germany to the United Kingdom and even South Korea—partner together to help more than one million children in 26 countries. Our common mission: to release children from poverty in Jesus’ name.

But there’s one thing that hasn’t changed: what’s at the heart of Compassion. We’re still challenging Canadian Christians to answer the same question that confronted Bob and Janet Forsyth and Everett Swanson so many years ago: “What are you going to do?”

Soon after joining Compassion Canada, I went to visit the president of Compassion International at the time, Wally Erickson. I took every opportunity to be near him and learn from him, and he constantly had stories to tell.

I remember coming home lamenting to my wife, “I met this guy who has the most incredible stories and I feel like I don’t have any. My life seems boring next to his. I would dream to be like that.”

My wife wisely said, “Barry, someday, you’ll have your own stories to tell.”
And that’s come true. I’ve seen God doing beautiful things through this ministry. Now, I don’t know when to stop telling my stories, until people simply walk away.

I met a pastor named Joel from Manila in the Philippines. God called him to plant a church in a large and dangerous slum. It’s a place where drugs, prostitution and violence are common. They built a little church with a handful of people. Pastor Joel would walk from his house through the slum to his church. As he passed, people would hurl insults, tomatoes and eggs at him. The church was robbed and broken into so many times that they had to build a wall with razor wire on top to protect it. For several years, it was an uphill struggle. Joel risked his life every day to minister there.

But one year, this church became a partner with Compassion. Through sponsorship, they were able to minister to children in this dangerous slum and, slowly, God began to open doors for Pastor Joel’s church. As parents brought their children to the centre, they saw the staff loving their kids. The children suddenly had access to health care and education. They came home with knowledge of the Bible and many accepted Christ. The children’s behaviour completely changed as they experienced new life in Christ.

And now Pastor Joel has a new problem. It takes him several hours to get to church each day. Everyone he passes wants to talk with him, to invite him in, to pray with him. He’s seen such a revival, that Pastor Joel’s church can’t hold all who want to come. The people of this slum couldn’t resist the genuine love of Christ through His people.
I’ve shared stories like Pastor Joel’s a thousand times and you know something?

I still get excited every time. Why?

Because even after thirty years with the organization, Compassion’s ministry excites me. I’ve never seen a ministry with such a strategic focus on combining missions and caring for the needs of children through the local church. There’s nothing else like it and I am so thankful to be a part of what God’s doing in the world through Compassion.

Through the rest of this book, I want to take you on a journey into Compassion’s ministry. In the next several chapters, you’ll learn what we mean when we say we’re committed to “releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name.” I pray your heart will be captured by this vision and you’ll be ready to answer the question that’s challenged so many: “What are you going to do?”
I first saw poverty—real poverty—in Haiti in 1984. I was three months into my role at Compassion and was sent to learn about our field work. I’d traveled outside of Canada in the past, but this was different. It was my first exposure to the developing world, and nothing—no amount of books, pictures or videos—could have prepared me for what I saw.

I learned the difference between compassion and pity. I experienced firsthand the anguish and suffering that poverty inflicts on human beings, especially children. I grappled with the dignity of life and misuse of handouts. I came face-to-face with corruption and the basest forms of evil.

And I was touched by the prevailing hope the gospel brings.
Getting a grip on “poverty”

Especially for those of us in the West, it’s tempting to look at poverty strictly in material or circumstantial terms.

“If these people just had enough food,” we think. “If that child could just get an education; if this family could just have access to basic medicine, then everything would be fine.”

Almost exclusively, this is the way poverty is framed in most discussion surrounding how to alleviate it today—and with good reason. Children and families living in poverty do need access to sufficient food, education and medicine. These needs are real and God calls Christians to care for them, as James reminds us:

> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [James 2:14-16 ESV]

In fact, neglecting this charge forces us to question whether or not God’s love really does live within us at all [1 John 3:17]. Christians have no grounds for ignoring the plight of the poor and needy.
But knowing our responsibility doesn’t mean it’s easy for us to respond well. Many of us experience reverse culture shock after seeing poverty for the first time and then by the needless excess at home. This was certainly my experience.

During my trip to Haiti, I was overwhelmed. I saw children gather water from a bat-infested cave, women carry pails on their heads for several kilometres each day and men bathe in ditches after a hard day’s work. I was so angry when I saw the contrast with how we live in Canada and took it out on people here at home.

In hindsight, I overreacted. I was right to be angry about what I saw, but I responded in the wrong way. I did not yet have the framework to properly understand and respond to poverty. **I needed to learn there’s more to poverty than material concerns.**

At Compassion, we have a holistic view of poverty—we believe poverty affects the whole person. We understand poverty in economic terms, but also recognize poverty goes beyond how much money you (don’t) make. We see poverty in terms of opportunity, but also understand it goes beyond having the right kinds of opportunities to improve one’s situation.

Poverty has a spiritual dimension as well. Its roots are not found in the natural world, but in the spiritual.

1 Compassion International defines economic poverty as living on less than $2 US per day.
The spiritual roots of poverty

When we read the Scriptures, we see that behind all the devastation poverty brings, there is something else at work. There’s a spiritual condition that frustrates and undermines our best efforts to change our own circumstances.

The opening chapters of the Bible show a world in which everything is perfect, one God declares “very good” (Genesis 1:31). God, humanity and the rest of creation live in perfect harmony. It was a world in which poverty could not exist.

That is, until the Fall. When Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator, they set in motion events that would turn God’s good creation, one in which poverty could not exist, into one where poverty is now the default setting.

Because of one man’s sin, all of humanity came under a curse (Genesis 3:16-19):

Soil that produces few edible plants is a result of the curse. War and corruption and cheating go back to the curse because they are driven by people who, being sinners, want desperately to become rich, powerful, and autonomous—like God.

All poverty has its roots in the curse. Everything else is just branches. Poverty, therefore, is fundamentally a spiritual issue, not a [simply] material issue or a matter of policies and systems and government.
This reality is often misunderstood. When someone says poverty is the result of sin, it’s too easily seen as blaming the poor for their circumstances. But this view is not affirmed by the Bible. Simply, to say poverty is the result of sin does not mean poverty is the fault of those trapped in it—it is a recognition that the entire world is fundamentally broken.

While that sounds gloomy, there is good news: **Jesus came to set people free from this curse.**

This doesn’t mean God promises that those who come to faith in Jesus will have health and wealth. The effects of sin and the curse remain at work in our fallen world.

But it does mean that if poverty at its most basic level is a spiritual issue—the result of sin—then there is an eternal solution.

There is a day when poverty will finally and fully end. A day when Jesus will return to bring about the new creation. He will wipe away every tear and God’s people will spend eternity with Him (Revelation 21:1-4).

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3 Although we do see truisms (such as those in Proverbs) where poverty and productivity are connected, the picture in the Proverbs shouldn’t be viewed apart from the rest of Scripture.
It doesn’t mean we stop trying to improve the here and now. Again, we cannot ignore the clear commands of God to care for the poor and oppressed—the widow, the orphan and the sojourner (Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 27:19).

But this is the hope we look forward to and it’s what drives what we do at Compassion. Education, health care, food, water... all of these things matter so much and have a profoundly positive impact on children’s lives. But understanding how the Fall affects everything helps us give children a hope grounded in the gospel. This hope has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of children. These were children beaten down by the lies of poverty. Lies telling them their dreams don’t matter. That they don’t matter.

They don’t believe those lies anymore. Instead, they serve their communities and nations, in whatever circumstances God has placed them, fueled by the love of Jesus and the desire to praise Him.

This is what the gospel does in our ministry. The gospel deals with the root Poverty—sin—from which all other poverty flows. To truly release children from poverty, we believe we must care for their physical needs and we must share the only message that offers the forgiveness of our sins, freedom from the curse, and reconciliation with our Creator.
Recommended reading

When a topic is as big as poverty, it’s impossible to say all you want to. But the good news is many times someone else already has! Here are a few I’ve personally benefited from that I’d encourage you to read to gain a deeper understanding of poverty and the Christian response:

1. *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert  
   (Moody Publishers, 2009)

   (Dutton, 2010)

3. *Awaiting a Savior: The Gospel, the New Creation and the End of Poverty*  
   by Aaron Armstrong (Cruciform Press, 2011)
Mike Bhuot grew up in the rough slums of Metro Manila in the Philippines. People don’t expect much from the slum kids in Manila, children whose parents are unemployed. These children spend their days rummaging through trash and get addicted to alcohol to forget their surroundings.

This may have been Mike’s fate if he hadn’t been sponsored through Compassion. Instead of digging through garbage and numbing himself to the circumstances of life with drugs or drink, he went to school, received health care and learned about Jesus. Mike graduated in 1996, and now supports himself and his family, including three kids, with a modest salary as a technical assistant.
Mike could be making six times what he makes now—he was offered a job in Singapore that could have set his family up nicely. But Mike felt called to stay in his community and minister to children living in poverty. These children live in makeshift homes on abandoned land. Some simply sleep in the streets. Their parents scavenge for food and struggle with alcohol addiction. Mike wanted to help these forgotten children, and share God’s transforming love with them. Every week, he and a group of volunteers serve food, sing, play and share Bible stories in the slum of Santa Quiteria.

Mike could have run from the devastating poverty of his youth. He could have gone to Singapore. Instead, he chooses to immerse himself in this community.

As a child, he didn’t just get his school fees paid and the occasional meal. The Compassion program shaped Mike’s whole person, equipping him to become an adult who could support himself and provide for his family. He learned the importance of helping others. He learned to love and serve God. And now he is changing the lives of children in his community. Mike is an example of how holistic child development works. Holistic child development means helping the whole child develop into the person God designed him to be.

THE COMPASSION PROGRAM SHAPED MIKE’S WHOLE PERSON, EQUIPPING HIM TO BECOME AN ADULT WHO COULD SUPPORT HIMSELF AND PROVIDE FOR HIS FAMILY.

- Left: Mike has devoted his time, energy and money to these forgotten children—just as he was helped when he was a boy.
Holistic Child Development: A multi-dimensional approach to helping children

For a child living in the slums of Manila, there are many disparate forces at work that perpetuate and deepen the cycle of poverty, many of which are physical needs. Dirty water makes children sick. Limited food leaves kids malnourished and, at times, stunted. Lack of medical care ends children’s lives, even in the case of easily preventable diseases. These physical factors are what a lot of us think of when we contemplate poverty.

But there are also social factors at work. Children grow up in families where their father has abandoned them and their mother is too busy working all hours of the day to provide love and affection. Children have fathers who are gang members and mothers who gave birth at age 15. Children grow up surrounded by prostitution, drinking and domestic violence. These social evils far too often repeat in the next generation, and the cycle of poverty continues.

And then there is the spiritual aspect of poverty. Some children have never heard that there is a God who loves them and have never seen evidence of God’s love in their daily lives. Tragically, there are children who grow up hearing they are worthless, they’ll never amount to anything and they might as well give up. These children too often believe these lies of poverty that the Accuser whispers.
Responding to these devastating influences in a child’s life requires more than a one-dimensional approach. Children desperately need adequate nutrition, but that alone can’t end the cycle of poverty. They need education, but that alone can’t shape a child’s character. They need biblical knowledge, but that can’t end the material poverty in a child’s life.

That’s why Compassion seeks to respond to each part of a child’s life, helping them to become responsible, fulfilled Christian adults.

**PHYSICAL:** A child needs to have access to medical care, adequate nutrition and the knowledge to maintain a healthy body as she grows up.

**COGNITIVE:** A child needs the resources to develop his mind, receive education and learn skills to become self-supporting in the future.

**SOCIO-EMOTIONAL:** A child needs to learn how to develop healthy relationships, make wise life choices and plan for and manage her life.

**SPIRITUAL:** A child needs to find forgiveness in the blood of Christ, find hope for the future in God’s plan for his life and develop a godly character as he follows Christ.
Compassion focuses on developing the whole child—an approach that helps release children from poverty instead of merely sustaining them through it. Through this holistic model, we have seen God working in amazing ways.

We have seen children grow up healthy, equipped to earn a living, have healthy relationships and serve God with all their hearts. These children grow up to be the adults who are changing the next generation of children. Like Mike, who is not only supporting his own family but helping the needy in his community, children are being released from poverty and becoming passionate Christ followers who can change their nations.

**Contextualized and customized to meet real needs**

We’re so convinced of this multi-dimensional approach that we’ve built it into the DNA of our holistic child development curriculum. This curriculum was written by experts in child development and integrates all four areas of development: cognitive, socio-emotional, spiritual and physical. So a mother will learn how to read (cognitive), and also learn healthy ways to resolve conflicts with her husband and children (socio-emotional). A ten-year-old boy will learn Bible verses to encourage him in his daily life (spiritual), while also learning how to avoid diseases (physical). A young woman will learn how to have pure, God-honouring relationships (emotional), and also learn the habits of servant leaders (spiritual).
A one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work with people. The needs of each individual in all four areas of development need to be addressed—and so do the needs of the community as a whole. If the primary threat in one community is the lure of gangs and HIV/AIDS in another, the way we help children needs to be different. Just like we need a multi-dimensional approach to children, our Compassion centres and church partners need the freedom to contextualize the program to deal with the vastly different problems they face.

This is handled by each Compassion centre’s leadership committee. The committee is made up of church leadership and members, parents from the community, centre staff and youth benefiting from the program. Working together with a staff member from Compassion’s country office (what we call a Partnership Facilitator), they ensure the centre is addressing all four areas of development while responding to the real needs of the children they serve.

The secret of successful child development

This multi-dimensional approach to development is the secret to making a real, lasting difference in the lives of children. We address the whole person, caring for their physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and spiritual needs and we do it in a way that makes sense for their country and community. And we begin when life begins: in the womb.
Rosine doesn’t remember her parents. She was just five years old when they were brutally murdered in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

She was raised by her siblings until they got married and left her alone in her parents’ leaky house in the chilly hills of northern Rwanda. Rosine didn’t have any land to farm, so she worked for her neighbours and earned about 80 cents a day for her exhausting labour. She was depressed and sick—working too hard and staying alone in a cold, wet home.
Rosine turned to prostitution and alcohol. She got pregnant. Her family, disgusted by her choices, refused to help her. So Rosine continued her hard labour in the fields while pregnant with twins. She had no other option.

One night, Rosine was in pain and went to the hospital. She gave birth to premature twins at seven months, Eric and Lea. The nurses at the hospital told her to keep her twins as warm as possible at home, but Rosine still had to work all day in the fields to have food to eat. She was weak, and her babies were weaker.

Eric was especially sick. He didn’t breastfeed well and had to stay in the cold, leaking house all day.

“I did not have a single coin,” says Rosine. “I couldn’t afford to transport my babies to the hospital.”

As it turned out, Compassion’s Child Survival Program opened in her village that month. On the day Rosine was registered, Lea and Eric were rushed to the emergency room by the centre’s staff.

Lea was malnourished. Eric had bacterial meningitis.

Lea survived. Eric didn’t.
The most vulnerable on earth

Children under the age of five and especially infants under the age of one living in poverty are the most vulnerable people on earth. They are defenceless and susceptible to disease, malnutrition and neglect.

When Jesus talked about “the least of these” in Matthew 25—the sick, the hungry, the unclothed—surely he thought of these vulnerable babies who are so often the helpless victims of poverty.

If we want to develop children holistically, as discussed in the last chapter, we have to start with infants. When babies or young children are malnourished, their physical and mental growth can be stunted for life. When babies are neglected by overwhelmed parents, their cognitive development is affected for life. And, tragically, when babies and young children are left unprotected from the disease-filled environments of poverty, they never make it to their fifth birthday. Like precious Eric, ten million babies and children under five die every year.

To Compassion's church partners, this isn’t just a statistic. It’s a tragedy that too often unfolds before their eyes each day, as they see frail and limp babies whose mothers can’t give them the care they need.
Saving the lives of "the least of these"

The Child Survival Program is Compassion’s response to help save and minister to “the least of these.” Program staff rescue moms and babies from poverty, providing food for malnourished infants, teaching moms how to take care of their babies and preparing children to take their first steps toward a life of promise and purpose—all through the local church.

How do we help moms and babies in this program?

**HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT.** We monitor the health and growth of children and expectant mothers. When they need medical care, we provide it. We teach mothers how to prevent common childhood diseases, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS. Mothers learn the importance of breastfeeding and family planning.

**COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT.** Babies receive age-appropriate, high quality learning materials designed to improve their intellectual potential. Mothers and caregivers learn about the importance of play and how they can use toys to help babies develop.
A SAFE ENVIRONMENT. Mothers learn about good health, hygiene and nutrition to keep their babies safe and well. They also learn income-generating skills, such as tailoring, to help provide for their babies. Mothers and caregivers receive counselling and support to help them know they are not alone, and mothers can form friendships with other women in the program.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING. Each mother in the program learns about the forgiveness and new life she can have through Christ. Through regular worship time, devotions, Bible study and other activities, mothers learn to worship the God of the Bible and raise their babies according to biblical principles.
How does it work?

As with all Compassion’s program, the Child Survival Program is run by our church partners around the world.

**A HOME-BASED APPROACH:** Program implementers regularly visit moms and babies at home. They monitor their health and also instruct them on important topics, such as how to store water and the importance of hand-washing. They read Scripture and pray with the moms, while also counselling them in the struggles they face. The moms hear that they are not alone and gain courage and strength for their daily lives.

**REGULAR GROUP MEETINGS:** Mothers and children come together for regular group meetings as well. Mothers learn about God together, learn skills such as literacy and cooking, and receive provisions for basic necessities in their home. They also take part in social activities, such as celebrating Mother’s Day and picnics for the whole family that help mothers learn self-esteem and help families learn how to relate to one another in healthy ways.

Through the efforts of our church partners, babies’ lives have been saved. Families have come to Christ. Broken marriages have been reconciled. And mothers have been equipped to care and provide for their little ones.
Redemption for Rosine & Lea

Even in the midst of tragedy, hope can be found. This was certainly the case for Rosine and her children. Although help arrived too late for baby Eric—bacterial meningitis is often fatal when not treated immediately—Rosine’s daughter, Lea, is now a healthy three-year-old. The program provided the treatment and supplemental nutrition Lea needed to survive. Rosine received items such as diapers, soap, clothes, towels, a blanket and a mattress to care for Lea, along with food for herself so she could have adequate nutrition while nursing.

Rosine is taking a tailoring class at night, a skill which will help her provide for her daughter. Through the program, she has also learned how to keep her daughter healthy, how to feed her and how to treat her.

Most of all, Rosine has learned of the God who loves her and gave His life for her. She gave her life to Jesus and is trusting that God will bless her with a godly man to join their family. Without the program, she doesn’t know what she would have done.

“I do not think I would have lived,” says Rosine. “I would not have survived because after giving birth, I was too weak to work. The Child Survival Program was a saviour not just for me, but for all the mothers in the program.”

Through this program, Rosine and Lea are taking their first steps toward a life of purpose and promise in Christ.
For 1,500 years, the caste system has operated in India under the basic precept that all men are created unequal.

This hierarchical social structure divided people into the priestly class, the warrior class, the trading class and the labourers. Years later, an “untouchable” class emerged—those who had the undesirable jobs of cleaning up human waste or disposing of animal carcasses. Their shadows couldn’t so much as touch those of a higher caste.

- **Right:** Sanjay is one of the "untouchables." At school, his teachers made him sit in a corner away from the other kids, and during lunch he wasn’t allowed to share food or eat with anyone else.
Although the Indian government abolished the practice of “untouchability” in 1950, it hasn’t changed the daily reality for thousands who still live amongst prejudiced neighbours.

Sanjay is an 11-year-old boy who lives in an isolated house outside his village. His family isn’t wanted within the village borders—they’re untouchable. People would heap garbage in front of their home to remind them that they were garbage. If Sanjay’s family tried to gather water at the local tank, they’d be chased away with shouts of derision.

Sanjay’s dad works in a rock quarry. His brother dropped out of school to work in the rock quarry. And Sanjay was on his way to a life working in the rock quarry too.

He had no aspirations for anything more. Neighbourhood children would call him names and shun him. At school he sat alone in a corner, not allowed to eat or share with the others.

“I wanted to have friends, but everyone made fun of me because of our caste,” says Sanjay.

Sanjay was certain his future meant remaining the lowest in society, toiling hours in a rock quarry for little gain. Shut out of society, he didn’t believe he was worth anything more.
Stuck on repeat

Many children around the world feel like they’re stuck; that they’ll be forced to repeat the same cycle of poverty that has kept their forebears trapped for decades or even centuries. Some children, like Sanjay, are caught in the caste system. Others are caught by the consequences of social evils such as alcoholism or child abandonment—and eventually repeat the pattern themselves. Still, others are caught by the absence of opportunities, living without access to education, health care or basic amenities, not knowing how to break out of the way their family has always lived.

Poverty deepens as over and over the causes and symptoms go ignored and untreated.

A light on a hill

But within this darkness, there is a growing army of compassion, a light on the hill for those stuck in suffering—the Church. Compassion’s church partners around the world see the suffering of children like Sanjay. They have a passion to share God’s love with the neediest.
That’s why Compassion’s Child Sponsorship Program connects sponsors with the church in the developing world to end poverty in children’s lives.

The program gives opportunities to go to school to those who can’t, provides regular health check-ups and supplemental food when needed, and teaches children life skills like proper hygiene and how to form healthy friendships.

Most importantly, children get to hear the life-saving message of the gospel as members of the local church teach them about God’s love for them.
How are we helping children in this program?

Children attend a Compassion centre at their local church, where they receive care and training in the four key areas of development:

**PHYSICAL:**
- regular health check-ups, including routine vaccinations
- treatment for injuries and illnesses
- a nutritious meal or snack when visiting the church
- education on health, sanitation and hygiene

**COGNITIVE:**
- assistance with school fees, supplies and uniforms
- after-school tutoring
- life-skills and vocational training
- develop a life-plan to help youth identify their unique skills and goals in life
SOCIO-EMOTIONAL:
- love and encouragement from personal sponsors
- care and attention from centre staff
- opportunities to develop basic social skills, such as how to interact with and respect others
- community service activities
- extra-curricular activities including sports, field trips and the arts

SPIRITUAL:
- Bible study, singing and prayer
- Christian education and discipleship from staff and volunteers who love and care for each child

Through these activities, Compassion’s sponsorship program helps children living in poverty develop healthy minds, bodies and relationships while learning about God’s love for them in Jesus Christ. They are given a chance to become healthy, responsible adults who can choose to follow Jesus.
An individualized approach

One of the greatest strengths of Compassion’s sponsorship program is our individualized approach from child registration through graduation. It’s possible because we work through the local church. Local churches can provide the individual attention necessary to truly change lives.

The churches we work with select children to participate in the program. Church and centre staff and volunteers know their communities and visit children’s homes to determine their need. Their work ensures we are able to help the neediest children in their communities.

Once children register for the program, staff and volunteers get to know them well. Children spend anywhere from 4 to 38 hours a week at the Compassion Centre, depending on their age and the country where they live. There is a low child to adult ratio, meaning each child has a caring adult who is tracking their development and knows their individual challenges and strengths.
Unstuck

Compassion sponsors are helping remove the obstacles—physical, social, spiritual and cognitive—that keep children stuck within the same cycle of poverty. Sponsors help release them from poverty in Jesus’ name.

Sanjay was stuck. Not just due to a lack of opportunities, but also because the caste system taught him that he was inferior, of low intelligence and worthy only to serve others.

But in 2008, a Compassion centre opened at a local church. Sanjay was the only “untouchable” at the centre. The tutors observed that he wouldn’t speak or interact with other children. These caring workers visited Sanjay’s family and learned about the humiliation they had been enduring. One of the social workers started spending time with Sanjay to understand him better. As she prayed with him and counselled him, he began to feel loved and accepted.

The centre began holding seminars with children, parents, teachers and village leaders to teach them of the evils of “untouchability.” They used passages from Scripture that describe the value God has given all humans and how we should love one another.

It was a slow process to change the people’s mindset, but now Sanjay enjoys the friendship of many other kids who play and eat with him.
Sanjay finds hope and encouragement in reading of God’s love for him in the Bible, and he is sharing that message with his Hindu family. He even leads a prayer group at the centre. Sanjay enjoys a sense of value and belonging that were unknown to him before.

Not only have Sanjay and his family found respect and acceptance in their community, but now they have hope for Sanjay’s future. They are confident he won’t have to work at the rock quarry like his father and brother. They believe that through the education and support he is receiving through Compassion, Sanjay will become an officer in his community.

Because of the compassion of one sponsor and the love of the local church, Sanjay is no longer shut out from society and doomed to repeat his family’s cycle of poverty. Along with more than one million other children being supported by loving sponsors, Sanjay is finding hope and opportunities for his future.

Above: Sanjay’s whole family has now found acceptance in their community. Sanjay, who was once too humiliated to even speak, now has lots of friends and loves studying at school.
Do letters really matter?

One of the first children my family sponsored together was a 5-year-old boy from India named Verababu. His photograph was front and centre on our refrigerator, and we loved receiving letters from him.

When Verababu was eight, I had the chance to go on a trip to India and meet him. For weeks before the trip, we assembled all sorts of gifts to bring him in a knapsack.

Getting to India was even more exciting—but not in a good way. On the flight from Singapore to India, one of the plane’s engines blew up. As I watched the flames light up the night sky, I felt sure my end was in sight. The whole plane erupted in screaming and panic. But after much praying and waiting, we landed safely in India, our lives spared. I felt blessed to be alive and I knew I would never forget this trip.

But the emotional experience of the flight paled in comparison to the day I arrived in the little village to meet Verababu.

The church had gathered for a special celebration, and I was the surprise guest speaker—a surprise to me, that is. There were about 250 people jammed into the small church. As I spoke, I scanned the audience for Verababu. I had his photograph memorized, but couldn’t place him.

Then it happened. My eyes fixed on a young boy who had the biggest smile of anyone in the room. It was magical.
After I finished my sermon, people came forward for prayer. Just about all the adults came to the front. I was overwhelmed with their sincerity. I reached out and prayed for several people at a time.

As I prayed, a woman approached me wearing a tattered sari. I began to pray for her and she fell to her knees, grasping my ankles. Her tears fell on my feet. The translator explained that this was my sponsored child’s mother. She was thanking God for me and my family. She was crying tears of joy and thanksgiving.

At that point my own tears began to run down my face and drop on her head. It must have been a strange sight—a visitor from Canada with an Indian woman sobbing at his feet, his tears falling on her head and her tears flowing onto his feet. It was a moment I will cherish forever.

Once we composed ourselves, she beckoned her son to join us. Verababu came running from his seat on the floor and the three of us embraced, crying.

A small shoebox

Verababu was holding a small shoebox, which he presented to me. Inside was every letter, card and photograph we had sent him over the years. He insisted I look at each one as we laughed together.

I found out that Verababu’s father had died of tuberculosis. His mother had been of a higher caste and didn’t have to work, until she decided to become a Christian. That’s when she was expelled from her caste and her family.
She survived by making baskets and selling them on the streets. My family’s sponsorship and letters had brought hope to this family.

**The letters sponsors write aren’t just a nice perk of sponsorship.**

Experiences like mine occur over and over again as people visit the children they sponsor around the world. Letters have the power to encourage and motivate children who are living in unthinkable situations. Many children confess that their sponsors’ letters are what kept them going when they thought about dropping out of school. Other children say their sponsors’ letters helped to disciple them and build up their faith in God. And many say their sponsors’ letters gave them the hope to carry on when they wanted to give up.

**Sponsors’ letters are an essential part of Compassion’s holistic ministry to children.**

Compassion’s ministry is about encouraging and strengthening children’s spirits—making a lasting impact on their sense of worth and teaching them to follow Christ as they grow up.

But the child isn’t the only one who is changed.

Not all of us have the chance to meet our sponsored children. But whether or not we get to meet them in this life, we should never think that sponsorship is a one-way relationship. That is a misunderstanding. The letters we receive mean as much as the ones we send. To this day I remember the details of the day I met
Verababu as if they happened yesterday. More than that, I have fond memories of receiving his letters and hearing about his prayers for me over the years. More than twenty years later, Verababu is an adult. He will never know the impact he made on my life. I sincerely believe that he blessed me more than I blessed him.

**COMPASSION’S MINISTRY IS ABOUT ENCOURAGING AND STRENGTHENING CHILDREN’S SPIRITS—MAKING A LASTING IMPACT ON THEIR SENSE OF WORTH AND TEACHING THEM TO FOLLOW CHRIST AS THEY GROW UP.**

*Above: Seeing how much my letters meant to Verababu, I never took them for granted again—and I realized how much I could learn from him, too.*
Every time I visit the field, it’s special, but some moments leave more of a mark than others. For me, one of these moments came at a graduation ceremony for students in our Leadership Development Program in Bolivia.

Among the graduating students was Mariana, a young woman Sharon and I met just after she completed Compassion’s Sponsorship Program. We became her mentors, and as the years passed we became so close that she started to refer to us as “Mom and Dad.” Mariana was the first person in her extended family to ever attend university. She graduated with a degree in business education.
The graduation ceremony was a formal affair. Mariana asked us to walk her down the aisle. It was so hard to hold back tears of joy as we escorted her to her seat. We were so proud of her, of the fine young Christian woman she had become. Her life could have been so different had she not been registered in Compassion’s program. She may have been like so many other young girls throughout her country who have so much potential, but must eke out a living performing menial labour or worse. Instead, here she was—a vibrant young woman equipped to help her community.

Countries in the developing world need more than a helping hand to escape poverty. They need more than assistance. They need a skilled labour force and leaders who can usher in change and prosperity.

As nations like India begin to develop, they need trained workers for rising numbers of white-collar jobs. But they not only need a skilled workforce, they need a workforce with integrity.

According to Transparency International, on a scale of 100, with 100 being very clean and zero being very corrupt, two-thirds of the world’s countries score below 50—a great number of those being in the developing world. Corruption fuels many of the problems facing these countries and makes it very difficult to eliminate them.

Every country needs good leaders, and the task for leaders of developing countries is urgent: these nations need men and women equipped to lead their

4 http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/
countries out of the despair of poverty and into a future of promise and purpose. But the world doesn’t just need “good” leaders—it needs godly leaders devoted to serving Jesus Christ.

That’s why Compassion works with the local church to develop young men and women with exceptional academic ability and leadership potential into Christian leaders through the Leadership Development Program.

THE WORLD DOESN’T JUST NEED “GOOD” LEADERS—IT NEEDS GODLY LEADERS DEVOTED TO SERVING JESUS CHRIST.
How are we helping emerging leaders in this program?

After completing the Child Sponsorship Program, exceptionally gifted young men and women like Mariana can receive a university education and participate in leadership training while being discipled in the Christian faith as active members of their local churches.

The Leadership Development Program provides:

**ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP.** Each student receives a combination of assistance to cover tuition, laboratory fees, textbooks, room and board, and miscellaneous expenses as they pursue an undergraduate degree from an accredited university in their own country.

**LEADERSHIP TRAINING.** Beyond the university classroom, students participate in a variety of unique experiential leadership training, such as retreats, camps and seminars that equip and inspire them to be confident Christian leaders.

**CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.** Each student is actively involved in a local church, care groups for Bible study and one-on-one mentoring from a mature Christian.

**HEALTH CARE.** Each student receives an annual checkup and medical support when needed.
A good doctor is hard to find

Lack of basic health care can turn a seemingly harmless infection into a life-threatening situation. Children in poverty need good health care, but rarely do they have doctors available to treat them. Perhaps that’s why when we ask sponsored children what they want to be when they grow up, they often say, “a doctor.”

John Eric Angeles was one of those children. His dad left their family when he was seven, and they had to move to an industrial town where life was bleak. But when John registered at a Compassion centre, he got help through those difficult years. The centre staff and children became like a family to him. His director at the Compassion centre was a guiding figure, since his father was absent.

When he graduated, John was convinced the Lord wanted him to become a doctor to help children, but he didn’t have the money to study this career. The Leadership Development Program opened in Peru just in time. John was able to study to become a physical therapist while also learning how to become a godly servant leader. Now he is a Rehabilitation Physician in a hospital in Lima.

John could have taken a well-paying job as a doctor for Peru’s elite, but he rejected this path. Instead, he is using his skills to help those in need, regardless of their status in society. Working with Compassion’s Child Survival Program, John is taking care of poorly developing babies. He’s leading his local church’s missions efforts and plans to take the youth to a remote Andean town near Cuzco to share the hope of the gospel with this impoverished community. But the children of his hometown remain closest to his heart. They desperately need proper medical care. Once he has finished his residency in Lima, John plans to return to serve them.
The next generation of leaders

John is just one of the next generation of leaders that God is raising up through the Leadership Development Program. Not only are young men and women equipped to become professionals, but they are helping other people out of poverty and changing their communities.

Here are just a few of the amazing young leaders God has raised up through the Leadership Development Program:

- Margaret is a member of the Ugandan parliament, advocating for the rights of poor villagers in her community.

- Kittisak is a pastor of a small church in a predominantly Buddhist area of Thailand where poverty and suicide are rampant.

- Ingrid is an epidemiologist—researching how to stop the spread of disease in Guatemala.

- Careen is a journalist in the Philippines and has reported on corruption in the handling of public funds.

- In Indonesia, Estrika has started a small online business selling handbags and is training poor mothers from her community to sell bags to provide for their families.
• In Bolivia, Franz studied politics and worked in the president’s cabinet for three years, where he sought to make decisions with integrity.

John and Mariana, Margaret and Kittisak and thousands of other young men and women in the Leadership Development Program give me so much hope for the future. Being born in poverty doesn’t have to limit these students. They are eager to learn and to make a difference. These young people are true testimonies to God’s amazing grace, escaping the trap of poverty and leading their communities and churches to do the same. Through the Leadership Development Program, they are using their God-given talents to serve God and change their nations—and their impact will be felt into eternity!
Six

RESPONDING TO CRITICAL NEEDS

On January 12, 2010, I left my home early in the morning to travel to Haiti with a team of pastors and their wives to show them our ministry. Compassion Haiti’s country director had arranged a special welcome for us at the Haitian airport. We were met by an airport official who escorted us past immigration and to a private lounge. It was a new experience for us—I felt like a foreign diplomat!

But as the time ticked by, I grew anxious about our long drive to the hotel. I didn’t want to drive through Port-au-Prince after dark with a busload of foreigners.

The delay actually saved our lives.
We got on our way much later than hoped, and the driver began to take shortcuts through back streets. We were mesmerized by the view of narrow dirt alleyways filled with people walking, piles of garbage and pigs rummaging for food.

Then, suddenly, we noticed a woman walking in front of our bus lose her balance. Out of nowhere, a concrete wall collapsed and knocked her down right in front of our bus. We felt the bus rock, throwing us from side to side. The buildings around us started to collapse. People were running, panicked.

Above: In the devastation that followed the quake, Compassion provided families with temporary shelter, medical care, water and emergency food.
Our bus was trapped and we couldn’t move for what seemed like an eternity. As we sat there, powerless, we watched the city collapse around us. From our vantage point, right in the middle of it all, we could see dust clouds billowing up above the city. We learned later it was a 7.0 earthquake—the most powerful to hit the country in over a century!

Eventually our bus was able to crawl through the rubble and reach the Canadian embassy. We learned that the Hotel Montana—where we would have been if we not been delayed by the diplomatic welcome—was destroyed in the quake and hundreds were trapped and killed. Across the city and countryside, more than 200,000 people were killed and many more injured.

Our bus full of Canadians was spared. We were able to leave the next day on a Canadian flight after an uncomfortable night in the courtyard of the embassy, listening to the screams of those trapped or injured.

After the quake, Compassion Haiti staff worked tirelessly to bring relief to children and their families whose lives were devastated by the earthquake. They received medical care, emergency food and water, temporary shelters and trauma counselling, among other critical interventions. Even now our staff in Haiti is working diligently, rebuilding schools and child development centres to bring children the stability they need.
Beyond sponsorship

Sponsorship brings so many benefits to children living in poverty: education, medical checkups and more, which we looked at a few pages back. But the Haitian earthquake is an especially dramatic example of situations in which children have needs that go beyond what sponsorship can cover. That’s where Compassion’s Response Programs come in.

**These initiatives meet the unique needs of Compassion children and their communities**, providing:

- Immediate aid in a crisis
- Major surgery for a child
- Clean water for a community
- Job training for parents
- Dozens of other practical needs, such as classrooms, curriculum and textbooks and supplemental food

As our church partners address these needs, the gospel transforms hearts as God works through the actions of His people.

Because these programs address so many different needs, we’ve found it helpful to break them into three primary categories: water and sanitation, skills training and urgent needs.
Water and Sanitation: saving lives through clean water and latrines

It’s easy to take for granted something as simple as turning on a tap or using the washroom. But having access to water and proper sanitation facilities prevents disease—and saves lives.

Compassion’s Water and Sanitation Response programs bring children access to the basic infrastructure necessary to keep them healthy. These interventions include:

• Access to clean water through wells, distribution systems or rainwater-harvesting systems
• Water filters for families to use at home
• Access to latrines and toilets

When families have access to basic sanitation and clean water, children get sick less often, parents save money that would otherwise be spent on health care and students are able to excel in school.
Therese was a widow raising four sons on her own. A lot of her money went to medicine—her boys seemed to always have stomach-aches and diarrhea. When one son got cholera, she went deep into debt keeping him alive. But Therese’s family received a Sawyer water filter from Compassion. Since they have been using it, none of them have gotten sick. In fact, since the neighbourhood received filters, not one child has suffered from the deadly disease of cholera!
Skills Training: teaching children and parents skills to get ahead in life

In countless countries around the world, education isn’t seen as a right—it’s a gift. Sponsorship ensures that a family can pay school fees and buy school uniforms, but there’s still much more that can be done. For families living in poverty, things like vocational training and extra-curricular activities are often out of reach.

Through Compassion’s Skills Training Response programs, children, students and parents get the tools they need to excel, such as:

- Post-secondary classes for students, including professional training such as nursing courses
- Extra-curricular activities for children, such as sports camps and music classes
- Income-generating skills for parents, such as tailoring

Children and their parents are learning new and profitable skills, and future leaders are taking the first steps to transform their world.
In El Salvador, teenagers who have no other prospects join gangs to find a family and an income. But at Compassion centres, staff help adolescents find alternatives to joining a gang by offering intense English training. Fluency in English is a highly-paid skill in El Salvador, and helps these youth find employment when they graduate.
Urgent Needs: meeting the unique needs of children and communities

There are so many different types of needs out there, and our church partners know those that are the most pressing. Working closely with their communities, congregation and Compassion, our church partners bring to us the needs that are their highest priority.

Through Compassion’s Urgent Needs Response programs, a wide variety of needs are met such as:

- Emergency aid and rebuilding after a disaster
- Access to health care; everything from major surgery to dental care
- Classroom, kitchen and library construction
- Malaria prevention

Our Urgent Needs Response programs are allowing our church partners to take ownership of the needs in their community and be a light as they respond to them.
One-year-old Estheysi in Bolivia needed heart surgery if she was going to survive to her fifth birthday. But her dad was just a security guard—he had no way to pay for the surgery to keep his baby alive. Compassion’s Health Response Program supplied the funds so Estheysi could undergo the surgery she needed, and now she’s a ball of sunshine!
THANK you
for your HELP
Hope in desperate situations

There are so many needs out there, it can easily feel overwhelming. A person can even become a little jaded. Over the past 30 years, I’ve seen both many successes and failures firsthand. And if there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s this: even in the most overwhelming disasters and situations, like the earthquake in Haiti, there is hope.

In Haiti, Compassion supporters, partners and children are bringing relief to desperate situations. Haitian churches are working with Compassion to help rebuild their communities. And children and their families who benefit from Compassion’s programs continue to show the world what it means to have hope. That’s what I love about Compassion’s long-term focus. We don’t take a “band-aid” approach to aid—we’re in for the long haul. We want to see children and communities reach the utmost of their God-given potential.

My frightful memories of surviving the earthquake are overshadowed by the joy of seeing how God can take such a tragedy and create good from it. I know God will use this event—and countless others like it—for the greatest good of the children and families affected. My prayer is that Compassion will be part of His great plan there, bringing hope and a future to these little lives, one child at a time.
There are a lot of great organizations helping those in need. So what makes Compassion distinct? The answer to this is important to me. It’s why I’m at Compassion and why I’ve stayed here thirty years. There are three things that we commit to above all else at Compassion, and by God’s grace we won’t deviate from them:

- We’re about Jesus Christ.
- We’re about the local church.
- We’re about children.

These things make up the core of Compassion’s ministry. They guide our decisions and shape our ministry. They make us who we are.
We’re about Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the centre of and reason for all we do in Compassion’s ministry. We are motivated by God’s love for us expressed in Jesus to not only care for practical everyday needs, but to see children living in poverty become passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Compassion Canada would probably be a lot bigger and win a lot more sponsors if we’d just take Jesus out of what we do. But our goal isn’t simply to be big. Our mission is to serve Jesus Christ and honour Him in all we do.

This has far-reaching effects on our ministry;

- **It affects how we understand poverty.** As you read in the first chapter, the gospel reshapes how we think about and respond to poverty.

- **It affects how we make decisions.** In all things—from financial stewardship to advertising choices—we seek God’s direction when making decisions and we seek to honour Him in all we do. Praise be to God, this commitment has helped us develop a track record for financial integrity both here and abroad.
It affects how we treat one another. We aren’t just an organization of compassionate people, we are brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ who are partnering together to empower the local church.

It affects how we carry out Compassion’s programs in the field. Because we believe that poverty is a spiritual problem, we work through the local church to not only provide for children’s physical needs, but to also respond to their deep need to encounter the Saviour. Christ is at the centre of our ministry because only in Christ can anyone have true hope and be set free.
Sharon—a new creation

There are so many amazing stories we could tell about children, adolescents, moms and dads who are finding Christ and becoming a new creation in Him. One of the most vivid stories for me is that of Rabina in Tanzania.

When Compassion opened its work in Tanzania in 2004, my wife Sharon and I wanted to be among the first to sponsor a Tanzanian child. We were delighted to receive a child pack with the photo of a beautiful young girl called Rabina Shaban Hussein. We fell in love with her immediately and began dreaming of the day we would meet her.

Above: Our sponsored child Rabina’s life was so dramatically changed that she changed her name to Sharon—my wife’s name!
We sent letters back and forth, getting to know one another. She told us about her family, how they were very poor and how blessed she was to have been registered in Compassion’s sponsorship program. She mentioned that her entire family was Muslim, but her parents gave her permission to go to the Compassion program at a local Christian church.

In each letter, we reminded her of how special she was to us and to God. We told her we loved her and prayed for her every day. We talked about our relationship with God and we encouraged her to follow Jesus. For the first couple years, we received no indication in her letters of how she felt about God or whether she was interested in spiritual things. But we continued to pray and ask God to reveal Himself to her as she participated in the Compassion program.

Four years after we began sponsoring her, we planned a trip to Tanzania to visit Rabina and her family. We didn’t tell her of our plans since we didn’t want to disappoint her if they changed. A few months before we left, we received another letter from Rabina. This letter was different from any other and filled our hearts with joy.

In the letter, Rabina explained that she had become a Christian. She had accepted Jesus Christ as her Saviour and Lord and she was no longer a Muslim. She explained that now that she was a Christian she wanted to change her name to take on a Christian name. She talked it over with her parents who had given her permission. The name she chose was Sharon—my wife’s name. She said this name meant so much to her because of our sponsorship and love for her. It was the name she now wanted to be known by.
At first, we didn’t understand the depth of this choice. But when we visited her several months later, we understood the gravity and maturity of her decision. The program director explained the bravery it took for her to decide to become a Christian and announce to her family that she was no longer a Muslim. She had been baptized as an outward expression of her faith in Christ, and she went to the government office and filled out all the paperwork to change her name from Rabina to Sharon. From that point on, all the letters we have received say her new name: Sharon Shaban Hussein.

When we visited her, we found a vibrant, vivacious young lady who loved God and was active in the local church. We visited her family, who supported her newfound faith. We have joined in prayer with Sharon that her entire family will one day become Christ followers.

We have been so overwhelmed and blessed to see young people like Sharon make sincere decisions for Christ. Sharon is a new creation, and we pray that one day her family will also turn to Christ.

At Compassion, we are dependent on Jesus Christ. As John 15:5 says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” [NIV]. We are so blessed and deeply grateful that God has chosen to allow this ministry to bear much fruit. We commit to remain in Christ and ask God to guide it and accomplish His will through it.
We’re exclusive about Jesus, not the people we help

Compassion helps people in a way that protects their dignity as human beings made in the image of God. That’s why we accept people of all faiths into our programs and don’t require conversion. We share our faith openly and encourage change, but never use coercion.
We’re about the local church

God has chosen one means to share the good news of the gospel with this broken world. It’s not a charity. It’s not a political entity. It’s not a corporation. It’s the church.

The church is the only agency that Jesus established on this earth (Matthew 16:18-19). In the Bible, there is so much affection placed on the church that Jesus calls it His bride. God loves the church and we want to love what He loves. That’s why Compassion partners with the local church to bring an end to poverty in the lives of the people we serve.

The church in the developing world

One thing I love about our ministry is that it’s carried out by members of the local church reaching out to their communities. Compassion partners with more than 6,000 local churches in 26 developing countries.

Compassion empowers the local church with resources and training to fulfil both:

- the Great Commission to make disciples, and
- the Great Commandment to love those around them (Matthew 22:36-40; 28:18-20).
As they minister to families in poverty around them, Compassion church staff become known and trusted in their communities. They become famous in their small communities for their outstanding love for the needy. People learn that the church is a place of safety and healing in their time of need and suffering. And because of that, the church is able to reach people for Christ while also ushering in a new season of hope for those in desperate need.

We equip churches to release children from poverty in Jesus’ name. Because they know their communities best, each church is empowered to implement the Compassion child development program in a way that meets the specific needs of the children they serve.

But serving local churches means more than equipping them for ministry; it also means being accountable to one another. It takes money to make a program like Compassion’s operate effectively and it can represent a significant temptation to staff and volunteers who live in the same poor communities they serve. That’s why we regularly perform internal and external audits of our funding offices, field country offices and Compassion centres where every dollar is accounted for. Just knowing this level of accountability is in place is a great source of comfort to so many of our committed staff around the world—and frees them to do the work of the ministry confidently and to the glory of God.
Down the bumpy road to Embu

To say that a lot of the places where Compassion works are remote would be an understatement. I remember one church I visited outside of Nairobi, Kenya. Our team travelled in two minivans for the two-hour drive from Nairobi to the town of Embu. We passed fields growing pineapples, coffee and passion fruit. The further we drove, the worse the road got, eventually becoming a narrow, two-lane highway pitted with potholes and speed bumps. Rain had made the roads virtually impassable at points.

There are a number of Compassion centres at churches in the area surrounding Embu. It’s dry and people grow just enough crops to feed themselves and survive—millet, sorghum and maize. We were greeted at one church in Embu with singing, sodas and speeches, as is customary in so many places where you travel in Africa. We then boarded the vans once again to visit a Compassion child development centre outside Embu. In true African style, several more people joined our van, and ten of us were crushed together, those of us with the longest legs jammed into the backseat.

We drove about twenty minutes then turned onto a dirt road—which was to become the ride of our lives! I think someone forgot to tell the driver that he wasn’t driving in the Indy 500. We bounced from pothole to pothole, creating a cloud of dust I was sure would be visible from Canada.
The farther we drove, the narrower the road became, until it was nothing more than a walking path. At some points, we wondered if we could proceed. I was becoming concerned that we had reached the end of the world.

“Do people actually live this far back in the jungle?” I asked the program facilitator. He assured me there were thousands of people here; we just couldn’t see them.

The land began to turn from green vegetation to dry ground. Families here often experienced food shortages, especially when the rains didn’t come. Often, fathers would leave for long periods of time to find work, often never to return to their families. Many children stayed at home to work the fields rather than go to school—we were told that only 25 per cent of children in the area ever completed their elementary education.

Children subsisted on corn, sorghum and cowpeas. Because of poor sanitation and unclean water, many children had parasites and skin diseases. Medical facilities were poorly equipped and often lacked basic medical supplies.

Two hours later, we finally arrived at the village of Kathigagaceru and limped to greet the waiting staff who ushered us to the Compassion centre office. Here we were honoured by speeches and sodas again, meeting with program leaders, the parents committee and the social workers. The meeting was constantly dotted with prayer—prayers of praise, thanks and petition for the children.

On the mud walls hung homemade charts and graphs showing their ministry to children and their families. Each sponsored child was listed and their progress charted. A map sketched on a sheet of cardboard showed how they had divided
the village into quadrants for evangelism and discipleship. The more we learned about this centre, the more impressed we were. Here, back in a remote corner of Kenya, was a church with a vision and a strategy to reach out to their community.

They had taken the tools Compassion had given them and were reaching whole families with the gospel. They testified about many people who came to Christ. The church had grown dramatically.

“When you love children, you get the attention of the parents,” said one of the leaders.

The centre’s social workers regularly visited each child’s home, a great opportunity for friendship and evangelism. In surrounding villages, the centre had been conducting student Bible study groups run entirely by older children who were part of the Compassion program.

The children were also learning vocational skills. They attended classes about masonry, carpentry, sewing, knitting and cooking. Some had even gone on to study at the college level. Everything we saw pointed to a committed and stellar team of church members reaching out to their impoverished community. I had to pinch myself to be reminded that we were so far back in the woods of Kenya. Few churches in Canada could boast of such a well-defined strategy for reaching their communities.

These people get very little applause, yet they are having a tremendous impact for the kingdom of God. They are being faithful in their communities. Through Compassion’s support, global churches like this one in Kenya are being trained and equipped to carry out amazing ministries to their communities.
The church in Canada

Compassion’s work with churches isn’t limited to the developing world. God has called Compassion to be a bridge serving the Church both in the developing world and here in Canada. At Compassion, we don’t view the Church in Canada as part of our marketing strategy—we want to be part of the Church’s mission strategy. Our call is to serve the Church.

Compassion enables Canadian churches to fulfil their God-given purpose of sharing the gospel of Christ and caring for the poor. As sponsors, church members write letters to children and pray for them, giving them hope because someone who lives thousands of miles away cares enough to encourage them and speak God’s truth into their lives. And when some of these same sponsors actually meet their children in person (something hundreds of Canadians do every year), they see the impact their sponsorship is making and it completely wrecks them. They’re all in, ready to see what God has in store for them and their sponsored children.

Compassion is all about equipping the Church to reach “the least of these” in Jesus’ name—helping the Church share the good news in word and deed. By working together, we get to see the Church fulfil its role as the light of the world, pointing the way to salvation and giving children hope for a life free from poverty.
We’re about children

Another question we sometimes hear is, “There are so many people in need in this world. Why focus on children?”

At Compassion, we focus on children because they are often the most seriously affected by poverty and yet they are the least able to do anything about their circumstances. Children are more susceptible to disease and malnutrition than adults. Children are often the ones who are the victims of exploitation, violence and abuse.

They are also at a vital stage of forming their worldview and values—the negative influences they are exposed to when young can impact their whole lives. On the other hand, when children accept Christ as their Saviour at a young age, it will impact their whole future for good.

Children are often strongly receptive to the gospel message. In fact, 85 per cent of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of four and 14. I myself can speak to the truth of how God can work in children’s lives when they are young.

I first learned the gospel message in the small country church my parents started. At the tender age of five, I understood enough of the gospel message to know that I wanted this Jesus to be my friend, and with the help of my parents I prayed a simple prayer inviting Him into my heart.

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In the years that followed, I began to develop a keen awareness of God’s call on my life. I couldn’t articulate it, but even at this young age I knew in my heart that God had a special destiny in mind for me that would involve service for Him for the rest of my life. My passion for the Lord, even at this early age, was sincere. At age eight, I joined the church prayer chain and carried out my half hour of prayer each day from 4:30 to 5 p.m., no matter what. My wife also accepted Christ as a child, and had a unique and special relationship with God as a young child and adolescent.

Compassion’s mission is to introduce children to Jesus Christ while they still have a life ahead of them to live for Him. My wife and I experienced childhood conversion, and our entire lives have been devoted to serving God. We are both living examples of what God can do in and through the life of a child.
Not just an afterthought

Although much of the world treats kids as an afterthought, children are valued by God. When the disciples tried to shoo children away, Jesus famously said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

Some people think that God can’t use children—that he waits until we’re grown up and mature. But we’ve seen God use children in so many ways around the world. When children get saved, they share the gospel with their parents and siblings, and whole families come to Christ. Children become passionate evangelists in their neighbourhoods. And they reach out to help those around them who are in need.

Just think about these examples from the Bible of how God can use children:

- God spoke directly to Samuel as a child (1 Samuel 3).
- Josiah became the king of Israel when he was just eight. He began to seek and serve the Lord wholeheartedly when he was 16 (2 Chronicles 34).
- God used David, an unknown adolescent, to defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17).
- God entered the world through Mary, most likely a teenage girl, whose song of praise is one of the most beautiful expressions of faith and praise in the Bible (Luke 1).
But God didn’t stop using children after Bible times. Here are just a few children who are serving God in their communities:

- Patricia is a 12-year-old living in the slum community of Santa Mesa in the Philippines, a breeding ground for thieves, criminals and prostitutes. Patricia gathers 5- to 10-year-olds once a week to teach them about Jesus and read the Bible.

- Pronchai is a 15-year-old from in Thailand who is leading community activities to prevent drug use and teach children about preserving the environment.

- Fourteen-year-old Axel, in Nicaragua, started “playing church” at home with a couple of his friends. They’d take turns preaching just for fun. Now this group has turned into a youth group of 30 children that Axel leads each Saturday at church. He encourages adolescents to stay away from gangs and drugs.

We don’t just invest in children because someday God might use them. We invest in children because they are Christ’s ambassadors today.

It’s much easier to focus on solving today’s problems than it is to shape the future. Our goal isn’t to fix every problem facing the world today. We want to mould future generations to be Christ-followers and world changers.
A missionary to one child

These three distinctives of Compassion’s ministry are so important to me because God created a passion in my life and my wife’s life through our time in pastoral ministry: a deep love for children, especially those at risk. From the beginning, Sharon and I also felt a deep attraction to world missions. One day we would talk about committing ourselves full-time to children’s ministry. The next day, we would have thoughts of becoming missionaries in some far corner of the world.

Through Compassion, God has woven these passions into one calling that is nothing short of supernatural. We have the opportunity to serve children, to support the local church in spreading the gospel and to help those in desperate need in our world. We are so passionate about this unique call—and we want you to consider being a part of that call, too.

God has given Compassion a unique place in helping the Church respond to the Great Commission and respond to the needs of the poor. The Bible is quite clear that Christ Himself established the church as His number one strategy to reach the world with the good news of the gospel. The backbone of Compassion’s programs is the local church. It’s how we bring the life-giving message of the gospel, followed by discipleship and practical love in action. This model is unique and provides the opportunity for Christians in Canada and around the world to become a missionary to individual children and release them from poverty in Jesus’ name.
God has taken us on an amazing journey over the last five decades at Compassion Canada.

Like Wally Erickson whom I once envied for his stories, now I can recount so many stories. Some of the stories God has given me were more adventurous than I’d bargained for: the traumatic flight from Singapore to India, political riots in Bolivia and one of the deadliest earthquakes in recent history.

But by far, my favourite stories are the ones that tell of young people whose lives are being changed. Who are finding Christ and new hope for their future.

People like Mike in the Philippines who is now reaching out to impoverished children in his dangerous slum. People like Rosine in Rwanda who has turned away from prostitution and alcohol to raise her daughter on God’s path. Children like Sanjay in India who was once rejected by society, but now has found a home
in the church. And young leaders like John in Peru, who is using his God-given skills as a physical therapist to care for babies born into poverty.

It’s amazing to look back to 1963 when this ministry started with just a handful of faithful volunteers in a basement in Canada. From that modest start, God is now mobilizing Christians and the Church in Canada to respond to His call to care for the poor.

**Now nearly 100,000 children in desperate need are receiving care and support in Jesus’ name.**

After fifty years, I can tell you this: Compassion Canada is more dedicated to following Christ than ever. And because of this commitment, we are seeing transformations in the lives of children and communities in poverty around the world.
The next fifty years

The opportunities are huge, and the needs are huge too. In almost every region where we work, Compassion’s church partners are prepared to double or triple the number of children they care for, as soon as we have enough sponsors.

It’s not all about numbers to us. We aren’t focused on getting big for the sake of getting big. We are committed to getting more children the help they desperately need and the opportunity to find Christ and be transformed. Almost every day of the year, 400 to 500 children come to faith in Christ through Compassion’s programs. Those children then share the gospel with their families and friends, and the impact for Christ is exponential. I truly believe this is one of the biggest differences we can make in world missions.

That is what motivates me. If we could add just one more sponsor today, we can bring another child to hear the gospel. We can change the future of one child’s life, and the life of that’s child’s family and community.

When I first started with Compassion in 1983, I would pack up my Chevrolet station wagon and set off on road trips across Canada to spread the story of Compassion’s ministry. I would go from church services to youth gatherings to senior meetings to women’s groups. Sometimes, when my daughters, Krista and Heather, were small they would come along and sleep underneath the display table at events. When they were older, they would help distribute brochures and talk to people about sponsorship—my first volunteers.
As I prepared for a trip, Sharon, Krista, Heather and I would sort through all the child packs and pray over each child. Krista and Heather would be so excited to know that daddy was going away to help find sponsors for these poor children. When I would return home, their first question was, “Daddy, how many kids did you get sponsored?”

Maybe I was naïve, but I truly believed that God would come alongside us in supernatural ways to make our dreams come true of seeing each one of those children whose faces looked out from those child packs find sponsors.

**Maybe I’m still naïve, but I also have dreams for Compassion Canada’s next fifty years.**

I dream of the supernatural growth that God can bring. What if every church in Canada was a partner with Compassion’s ministry? What if every Christian became a sponsor? Can you imagine the impact we’d have for the kingdom of Christ if every Christian in Canada sponsored a child?

What if God did immeasurably more than we could hope for or imagine? How many thousands of children would have an opportunity to receive the care they need and the message of Christ?

I remember when we at Compassion Canada dreamed of reaching 10,000 children. Everybody laughed. They said, “10,000? This is Canada! Where are you going to get 10,000 sponsors?” Now we’ve passed that and we’re coming up to 100,000. We’ve seen God do amazing things in the past, and we are praying that by the grace of God He will continue to surprise and amaze us, releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name.
When Everett Swanson returned home from seeing the desperate plight of war orphans in South Korea, he couldn’t stop wondering, “What are you going to do?” He answered that call, and God has used that single act of obedience to save over one million children from a life of poverty and hopelessness.

God can do immeasurably more than we imagine. All that is left to be answered is—what are you going to do?

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)*
Take a simple step to change the life of a child!

HELP A BABY SURVIVE: Give moms and babies a chance to not only survive, but to thrive in Christ through the Child Survival Program.

BECOME A MISSIONARY TO ONE CHILD: Sponsor a child and help them start towards a future of promise.

RAISE UP A GODLY LEADER: Support Leadership Development students as they gain professional and leadership skills to change their nations.

MEET URGENT NEEDS: Help save and enrich lives through access to emergency medical care, clean water, malaria nets and vocational skills training.

If you want to hear more ways you can get involved in changing the lives of children in poverty, visit www.compassion.ca or call 1-800-563-5437.
What is Compassion?

As one of the world’s leading child development organizations, Compassion partners with the local church in 26 countries to end poverty in the lives of children and their families. Today, more than 1.4 million children and their families are discovering lives full of promise and purpose as they develop in all aspects of their lives—minds, bodies and relationships—while discovering God’s love for them in the gospel of Jesus Christ.